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DRAFT REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE FOR PROGRAMME MATTERS ON ITS IN-SESSIONAL MEETING HELD DURING THE FORTIETH SESSION OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL, 1-18 JUNE 1993

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Addendum

CHAPTER III. COUNTRY, INTERCOUNTRY AND GLOBAL PROGRAMMES (continued)

General discussion on country programmes

1. The Committee held a general discussion at the conclusion of its consideration of country programmes. The Assistant Administrator and Director, Bureau for Programme Policy and Evaluation, thanked delegations for their valuable comments on the fifth cycle country programmes. In summing up the discussions on the country programmes, he noted that donors, recipients and the secretariat had moved closer to a common interpretation of the guidelines contained in Governing Council decision 90/34 of 23 June 1990. However, he noted three issues on which he thought consensus had not yet been reached: the criteria for assessing whether a country programme was well-focused; the role of UNDP in aid coordination; and the question of conditionality in the use of UNDP resources.

Focusing country programmes

2. The Assistant Administrator noted that in their discussions of the fifth cycle country programmes, delegations had expressed the view that there should normally not be more than three to five areas of concentration in each country programme. That did not, however, easily translate into sectors and subsectors nor did it provide guidance on the total number of projects or activities that should be aimed at. For financial and administrative reasons, for example, a

programme with a focus on one subsector might still be divided into as many as 25 projects. Vested interests, long-established relationships and the maintenance of important goodwill continued to lead to a lack of focus.

3. Delegations commented that fifth cycle programmes seemed to be surprisingly similar in focus and questioned whether that was a true reflection of national priorities. They noted that the six areas of focus identified in Governing Council decision 90/34 might have contributed to the similarity. One delegation suggested the emphasis on the six areas of focus might need to be reviewed while another found the thematic comparison across programmes highly useful. One delegation regretted that gender had received only perfunctory treatment in the programmes, with little analysis of how to address the issue. Environment, on the other hand, had been well integrated.

4. The Assistant Administrator responded that the areas of focus were in fact problem areas common to most countries. They had therefore provided a realistic focus for fifth cycle programmes in the context of an overall focus on sustainable human development, and in accordance with Governing Council decision 90/34.

5. The representatives of the Regional Bureaux commented that a serious attempt had been made to focus programmes on the areas of focus identified by the Governing Council and to limit the length of the programme documents. Despite the apparent similarity in focus at the programme level, needs of countries varied at the subprogramme level. For example, there was a difference in the ways to achieve privatization in Africa and in the newly independent states of Eastern Europe.

Aid coordination

6. The Assistant Administrator noted that some good examples of the role of UNDP in assisting host Governments in aid coordination had been mentioned (in Bolivia and Pakistan) but doubts had also been expressed on the role of UNDP in that regard. The discussion had largely focused on coordination mechanisms such as round-table conferences and consultative group meetings, but the demand for day-to-day coordination in sectors and programmes was often even more important, particularly in developing the programme approach. The demand for coordination services varied from country to country and UNDP needed to outline those differences in order to lay down criteria for progress. UNDP intended to undertake further study of the demand for such coordination services to give a better picture of the potential and the limits of the role of UNDP. A report would be submitted to the Governing Council at its forty-first session (1994).

7. Delegations considered that coordination could be viewed on two levels: (a) coordination within the United Nations system to promote collaboration, with a motivating and facilitating role for UNDP; and (b) assistance to Governments to develop the capacity to use external resources more rationally. Success in coordination was attributed to a number of factors, including the Resident Coordinator's skill in team-building and the coordination capacity of the recipient country. It was proposed that UNDP examine the factors that contributed to success and continue to develop appropriate training and support for Resident Coordinators.

8. The representatives of the Regional Bureaux noted that while the personality of the Resident Coordinator played an important role in successful coordination efforts, the interest of the host country was also important, as was the cooperation of key bilateral donors.

Conditionality

9. The Assistant Administrator noted that questions had been raised on the appropriateness of UNDP imposing conditionality on the transfer of its resource. He stressed that the term had been created by the IMF to describe a negotiating situation that pertained specifically to the Fund's mode of operation. He pointed out that UNDP could not impose formal conditions on recipient countries. UNDP could only build on conditions related to effectiveness and impact rather than establish overall policy conditions that could hold the country programme in abeyance. The Administrator could refuse to release project funds if agreed counterpart inputs were not available. Under the programme approach, policy conditions related to the success of a specific programme might also be agreed to by the parties. This could lead to a redirection of resources to other programmes if the agreed policy environment was not in place. The Administrator could withhold formulation of the country programme as a whole only if some major disaster or breakdown occurred, as in the case of Somalia.

10. Several delegations cited the legislative basis for UNDP assistance and its emphasis on neutrality and flexibility to benefit recipient countries. They urged that political conditionality no longer be a feature in the approval of country programmes. The current trend was harmful to UNDP. On the other hand, it would be naive to expect assistance without some conditions pertaining to performance and need.

11. Other delegations pointed out the tension between conditionality and national sovereignty, stressing that the issue was one of accountability and approval by the Governing Council on how best to use resources. They cautioned against a return to the language of the 1970s and stressed that there was agreement that development policy in the 1990s must focus on people and that a strategy to that end would be successful if conditions were right, i.e., if the economic situation, political climate and social and human rights situation were conducive to programming. Moreover, the enabling environment should be adequate for the efficient implementation of UNDP programmes. Reliance on lessons learned and performance indicators could contribute to an assessment of the conditions needed for effective programming.

Other issues

Evaluation and feedback

12. Delegations observed that while the overall formulation of the country programmes was good, the assessment of lessons learned and constraints encountered had not been given adequate attention in most of the fifth cycle programmes. It was therefore difficult to determine whether tangible results had been achieved. There was too little focus on impact, possibly because of the lack of measurable performance indicators. There was a need to link evaluation more to planning and to develop further the necessary modalities.

Apparently too little time was devoted by the field office to in-depth analysis of experience and to the needs of the recipient countries. On the other hand, the image and visibility of UNDP had improved when the Organization played a role in analysis and information collection and dissemination.

13. The Assistant Administrator and representatives of the Regional Bureaux agreed that evaluation and feedback should be streamlined and become a more integral part of the culture of the Organization. As a result of new programming approaches, support cost arrangements and decentralization, the administrative workload of field offices needed to be reviewed in relation to the substantive analysis, information dissemination and coordination roles to be undertaken.

Other comments

14. Delegations welcomed efforts to include the participation of concerned country representatives in the presentations of the country programmes to the Committee. It was suggested that a summary table be prepared on the fifth cycle programmes showing approvals, extensions and dates of the mid-term reviews. The usefulness of the matrix on the six areas of focus in the country programmes was questioned and it was proposed to include information on the staffing of respective field offices. It was noted that while programme delivery was treated in detail in the programme support document, some information might also be included in the country programme document. The country programme document was becoming increasingly useful as a frame of reference for external use, as was the case for certain World Bank documents. The link between the advisory note for the country programme and the proposed country strategy note for United Nations system assistance needed to be explored. One delegation asked why the fifth cycle indicative planning figures (IPFs) for Latin America were so small. Another delegation said he had noticed a distinct style emerging in the programmes for different regions and wondered how much cross-over there was from one region to another, for example in terms of staffing. The optimal time for field visits was also raised.

15. In reply to several questions, it was noted that there was no optimal time given for field visits, in view of the rolling nature of programming. In Latin America, UNDP had evolved from a management function to a key partner in fund-raising. IPF resources for Latin America, allocated according to the general formula agreed to by the Governing Council, were increasingly being supplemented by cost-sharing that far exceeded core resources. Regional differences in approach to programming stemmed from the realities in the field as well as the general organizational culture. Country programme management plans were being further refined to provide better support to programming as it evolved. The Assistant Administrator and the representatives of the Regional Bureaux thanked delegations for their thought-provoking comments and in-depth interest in the fifth cycle programmes.